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## How the A-11 Was Born

President Johnson's announcement that the United States has developed an advanced experimental jet plane, whose performance "far exceeds that of any other aircraft in the world today," has an interesting political and engineering background.

Mr. Johnson explained that the disclosure of the 2,000-mile-an-hour plane, dubbed the A-11, was being made to permit the "orderly exploitation" of its advanced technology. But the announcement also tends to undercut those critics of the Administration—notably Senator Goldwater, other Congressmen and the Air Force—who have been urging the continued development of manned aircraft, an issue that was acquiring some importance in the Presidential campaign. At the same time the disclosure notifies Russia that the United States retains a technological lead.

Chronologically and technologically, the A-11 is simply what was once called unofficially the U-3, a drastically modified follow-on to the famous Lockheed U-2. Numerous high-altitude reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union were made by the U-2 until one was shot down in 1960, with consequences that shook Russian-American relations.

The new plane was originally intended for the same purpose of high altitude reconnaissance. Experts knew as long ago as 1958 that the development of Soviet antiaircraft missiles would sooner or later doom the U-2 which had a ceiling in its original version of about 70,000 feet, and actually flew, in later versions, up to

90,000 feet. The U-3 follow-up, started in 1959 in the Eisenhower Administration, was intended for flight at about 120,000 feet and at higher speeds than the U-2 was capable of making. In its original conception, it was to have been purely an unarmed reconnaissance aircraft.

However, the development of reconnaissance satellites with cameras of fantastic power and clarity lessened materially the need for the U-3. The President's announcement means not only that the development of a new high-flying reconnaissance plane has been completed but also that the lessons learned are now being applied to the further development of a manned interceptor, high-speed bombers and commercial airliners intended to fly at three times the speed of sound.

The A-11 does not in itself meet the needs of any of these types. It is not a combat plane but an experimental jet, which gets its altitude by increased speed and improved engine rather than by the long, glider-like U-2 wings.

It may never carry weapons; if it does, the present version may have to be materially modified. It represents an engineering breakthrough on several fronts and a tribute to Lockheed, but it will not satisfy the need for an advanced manned interceptor, a long-range bomber or a new high-speed commercial craft.

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### Spy Plane Recalled

*Special to The New York Times*

MOSCOW, March 1—A Soviet newspaper printed an account last week of a visit to the ground-to-air missile unit near Sverdlovsk in the Urals that "downed a spy plane with the first shot May 1, 1960."

The plane was the United States U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers, but the newspaper, *Sovietskaya Moldaviya*, did not mention that.

The occasion for the article was Armed Forces Day.